



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: December 10, 2020

Agenda Item: Everson Bench Conservation Easement, Region 4

Action Needed: Final Approval **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

Background: FWP proposes to purchase a conservation easement (CE) on 1,733 acres owned by Keith and Runsigma Glass, north of Denton. This proposed CE, referred to as the “Everson Bench Conservation Easement,” would protect and conserve in perpetuity mixed sagebrush-grassland and agricultural habitat adjoining the Coffee Creek and Arrow Creek Breaks in deer/elk hunting district (HD) 426. The property serves as a gateway to these breaks, which comprise a portion of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. These habitats provide excellent mule deer, antelope, and upland game bird habitat while supporting many non-game species associated with grass and shrublands. The CE would also ensure public accessibility to approximately 9,000 acres of currently inaccessible public land. Elk are also currently expanding in this area as their population in HD 426 increases.

The easement would preclude further conversion of native ground, limit development, and offer managed public access opportunities in perpetuity. An independent appraisal valued the easement at up to \$967,500, but the landowner is donating a portion of the value. FWP’s purchase price for the CE would be \$640,000. The cost of the CE would be covered using a combination of Habitat Montana, Access Public Lands, and Safari Club International Great Falls Chapter funds.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The draft EA was released on October 26, 2020, and the comment period concluded November 25, 2020. FWP received 44 total written comments, including 34 in support of the proposed action, 7 in support of the No Action Alternative, 1 recommended tabling or postponing purchase, 1 supported a conservation easement on only a portion of the land, and 1 did not specify support. Comments and responses by FWP are included in the Decision Notice. The Decision Notice recommends completion of the Everson Bench Conservation Easement as proposed.

Alternatives & Analysis:

Proposed Action: To purchase the Everson Bench CE. This would assure habitat functions and public recreational access while remaining in private ownership.

No Action: FWP would forgo a partnership to conserve and enhance valuable wildlife habitats and to ensure public access.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends approval of this proposal to conserve and enhance wildlife habitat and support public recreation opportunities on this land and adjacent public lands.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission approve the Everson Bench CE as presented.